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ANNALS OF SILVER SPRING.

BY GIST BLAIR, MAJ. J.A.R.C., U. S. A.

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RUINS OF MONTGOMERY BLAIR'S HOUSE AT SILVER SPRING. BURNT BY  
THE CONFEDERATES UNDER GENERAL EARLY.



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## ANNALS OF SILVER SPRING.

BY GIST BLAIR, MAJ. J.A.R.C., U. S. A.

(Read before the Society, April 17, 1917.)

Montgomery County, within which Silver Spring is situated, was segregated from Prince George's County in 1748, when it became a part of Frederick County. Its historic soil even then should have felt and heard in whispers the coming of great events. General Braddock marched across it on his way to defeat in the French and Indian War, where General Washington gained the first experiences of a soldier. In his company and as a companion, my great great-grandfather, Christopher Gist, born and raised in Baltimore, also marched across the soil of Old Montgomery.

The few and scattered settlements which were then in existence were not near Silver Spring. Indians, principally Piscatawags, roamed over the country and as late as 1797 an act of assembly was passed for Montgomery County, offering rewards of \$30 per head for every wolf over six months old and \$4 for every one under that age.<sup>1</sup> No doubt these wolves then made their homes around Silver Spring, because the first settlements ran along Rock Creek and the Eastern Branch of the Potomac. Silver Spring remained as wild as any spot on the banks of the Mississippi or Columbia Rivers. No sounds of population thrilled her waving pine trees and the flush of life in the budding of the springtime must have been without man's knowledge or his care. The shades and shadows of Silver Spring were left unnoticed by the early settlers,

<sup>1</sup> Scharf's "History of Maryland," Vol. 1, p. 641.

who, stimulated by the remunerative prices for tobacco, reduced the land of Montgomery County to cultivation.<sup>2</sup> This staple so appealed to Marylanders when the first settlements occurred that it was used in the place of money as a medium of exchange. Wages were paid in tobacco and in 1732 tobacco was made a legal tender at the rate of one penny per pound. Fines for criminal offenses were paid in it; Sabbath-breaking or selling liquor on Sunday, were punished at the rate of from 200 to 2,000 pounds of tobacco and even the salary of the learned and witty rector of Rock Creek parish was paid in it, he enjoying an income of ninety hogsheads of tobacco a year.<sup>3</sup> In making reference to these early settlers of Montgomery County, who exhausted her lands and whose life is now largely forgotten with its come-easy, go-easy methods, we must not forget the brilliant and gifted Philip Barton Key, who lived in luxury at Woodley, as well as the second one of that name, son of Francis Scott Key, author of the "Star Spangled Banner," the latter shot by General Sickles two blocks from here.<sup>4</sup> The new Key Bridge across the Potomac River where the old Aqueduct Bridge exists will when built carry the name of Key down to posterity among us.

These were bright and happy days for the old squires of Montgomery County and our District of Columbia, who built handsome homes and lived at ease in these neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> The parson's home continues standing in the county and is known as "Hayes" and is occupied and owned by Mr. G. Thomas Dunlop, one of the descendants of James Dunlop, who bought it about 1792 from the parson's estate.

<sup>2</sup> Scharf's "History of Maryland," Vol. 1, p. 666.

<sup>3</sup> Forbes Lindsay's "History of the City of Washington," p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Scharf's "History of Western Maryland," Vol. 1, p. 399.

<sup>5</sup> Scharf's "History of Western Maryland," Vol. 1, p. 399.



This Parson Williamson was one of the richest men of the time and he rode straight to hounds, negotiated his three bottles of wine at a sitting and freely backed his or his friends' race-horses and played his whist for double eagle points and five on the rubber as well as the best of them. Another like him lived at "Clean Drinking Manor"—a certain John Coates by name, who received a grant of land from the Crown in 1680 of 1,400 acres which lay to the north. This great property was enjoyed, lived in and worked until it finally descended through the female line to a certain Charles Jones, who erected a handsome Manor House upon it in 1750. The Joneses, like the Coateses, were the same jovial kind and the Joneses' last descendant was buried on his ground and apparently was then not only dead, but bankrupt, too, for he left this epitaph upon an old stone to mark his grave:<sup>6</sup>

To the southeast of Silver Spring lay "Warburton," the home of the Diggs family. A part of this manor was known as "Green Hill," named after the ancestral home of the Diggses in Kent County, England, where Sir Dudley Diggs lived in the reign of James the First. And William Dudley Diggs, who resided here, has endeared himself to every one of us, because he took into his home as a guest the now famous L'Enfant, when poor and old and without a friend but his dogs, and kept him and fed him without cost until he died in 1825, and he buried him in his garden—a lovely spot he had designed and laid out near his house.<sup>7</sup> He is

<sup>7</sup> Forbes Lindsay, p. 21 and p. 71.

<sup>6</sup> T. H. S. Boyd's "History of Montgomery Co.," p. 31.

"Here lies the body and bones  
Of old Walter C. Jones  
By his not thinking  
He lost 'Clean Drinking,'  
And by his shallow pate,  
He lost his vast estate."

described as a tall, melancholy man of distinguished appearance, dressed in threadbare surtout and high bell-crowned hat, leaning heavily upon a staff and followed by one half dozen hunting dogs.

This beautiful place, still called "Green Hill," owned by the estate of Elisha Riggs, is occupied each summer by Mr. and Mrs. George Howard, a grandson. The garden in which Major L'Enfant was buried was laid out by him, showing much of the same wonderful talent which he displayed in laying out the city of Washington. It is still carefully preserved by Mr. and Mrs. Howard and when the remains of Major L'Enfant were removed to Arlington, I was invited to be present at the disinterment as a representative of the owners of the property, and witnessed the removal of his remains and was given a section of the cedar tree which grew at the head of the grave and whose roots passed through it and which no doubt was partially nourished by the remains of Major L'Enfant.

The places of "Riversdale," "Arlington," "Analoostan," "Duddington," and others were within riding distance and enjoyed by similar owners.<sup>8</sup> These great estates and landed proprietors surrounded Silver Spring and the District of Columbia. Their owners and residents were wonderfully prosperous, possessed many slaves, and in part belonged to excellent families of English origin. They drank, were addicted to duelling, racing and cock fighting, and lived as gentlemen then lived.

But besides this they were intensely patriotic and the Revolution found numbers of them fighting everywhere in the ranks of the colonists.<sup>9</sup> It was among these settlers and tobacco planters, on whose patriotism I have not time to dwell, on the first day of Octo-

<sup>8</sup> Forbes Lindsay, p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Scharf's "History of Western Maryland," Vol. 1, p. 643.

ber, 1776, that Montgomery County was separated from Frederick County and created into a county by itself. At this time they were seething with animosity towards the mother country, so quite naturally Richard Montgomery's name appealed to the mind and heart of every man. This brilliant Irishman, who had fought with General Wolfe at Quebec in the English army, had married a daughter of Judge Robert R. Livingston, of New York, where he had settled. Early in the dispute, however, he took sides with the colonies and in 1775, giving up the comforts and luxuries in which he lived, victoriously led an expedition into Canada, where he was rapidly conquering the entire Province, when the question of a new name for our county arose. And they selected his name—"Montgomery." Alas, his living fame was short-lived. Perhaps few men have ever lived whose untimely death caused keener regrets than that of General Montgomery, who died like the great Wolfe in the hour of his triumph at Quebec and his remains now lie in the churchyard of Trinity Church in New York City, surrounded by the whirl and eddy of Wall Street. But his death intensified the devotion of Americans to his memory, and counties and cities, and children, were alike named for him. My grandfather, Francis Preston Blair, was one of those who sought to perpetuate his fame by naming a child in his honor and my father was therefore named "Montgomery Blair," so Montgomery Blair living in Montgomery County both traced their name to this early hero in our struggle for independence.

Silver Spring lay in peaceful slumber during these stirring years and not until my grandfather, who had been brought from Kentucky by Andrew Jackson, President of the United States, soon after his election, rode into its delightful wilds on his horse, Selim, and

discovered the beautiful sparkling spring from which its name is derived, did it begin to live on the map. He had purchased this saddle horse from General William Lingan Gaither, after whose family the prosperous town of Gaithersburg, in Montgomery County, takes its name, then a representative man, and while riding Selim one day outside the boundary of the District of Columbia, his horse became frightened and threw his rider and ran away among the thick growth of pines in the valley to the west of the road which is now known as Georgia Avenue, in the District of Columbia, formerly Seventh Street Road, in the county. He followed his horse into the woods and found him snared by the reins by a bush which had caught the reins dangling, and near the place was a beautiful spring full of white sand and mica which the gush of the water from the earth forced into a small column which sparkled as it rose and fell like silver. He was charmed with the spot and purchased the property. It was not dear and I have a parchment certificate showing that some of the land was bought direct from the state. My earliest memory of Silver Spring includes this beauty of the spring described by him and quite famous at the time, but alas, it is now no longer the same. The column of shining silver, sand and mica, ever rising, ever falling, ever sparkling in the water and the sunlight, was presided over by a marble statue of a beautiful water nymph placed there by my grandfather, and it was endless joy for me, a little country boy, to sit and watch and dream upon this exquisite combination of white marble and living water. But like many dreams of childhood it has gone. A freshet

<sup>10</sup> T. H. S. Boyd's "History of Montgomery Co.," p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Scharf's "History of Western Maryland," Vol. 1, p. 764.

<sup>12</sup> George Alfred Townsend's "Washington Outside and Inside," pp. 718, 719.

caused by a heavy storm washed earth from the surrounding country into the spring and destroyed the sand and mica. No effort has since been able to renew the simple beauty of that early Silver Spring. The sand does not sparkle as it did, nor the mica shine in the sunlight, and I have heard people say as they gazed at it, why was this called Silver Spring?

Francis Preston Blair<sup>13</sup> was born at Abingdon, Virginia, April 12, 1791. His father, James, was the son of John Blair, acting president of Princeton University, — when Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, whose statue you can see on Connecticut Avenue and N Street, was called there to be president of the University. James Blair, after marrying in Virginia, removed to Kentucky, where he was Attorney-General of the State for some thirty years. My grandfather married Eliza Violet Gist, whose grandfather was that same Christopher Gist who had marched across Montgomery County with Braddock to battle with the French about a hundred years before. After engaging in the contest in Kentucky between the Old Court and New Court which almost destroyed the state, and serving as clerk of the New Court, he became interested in the Kentucky *Argus*, a Democratic newspaper published at Frankfort, and he wrote in this paper a strong article denouncing nullification, which attracted the attention of General Jackson, then President of the United States, who was strongly opposed to disunion. President Jackson sent for my grandfather and in 1830 helped him to establish a newspaper in Washington, the special purpose of which was to defend and explain the policies of the administration. This paper, the *Globe*, became a power and the history of Jackson's and Van Buren's administrations can best

<sup>13</sup> Manuscript Life by Montgomery Blair.



be understood from its columns. But after Van Buren's defeat, the *Globe* having warmly denounced the Southern leaders, was reorganized when President Polk succeeded to the Presidency, and he dismissed my grandfather as editor but sought to retain his friendship and offered him a foreign mission. Mr. Blair declined the mission, and said, according to my father, that in relieving him of his editorship President Polk had conferred upon him the greatest favor, and that nothing could induce him to give up his home at Silver Spring.<sup>14</sup> My grandfather retained his opinions and later vigorously opposed the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and declared its repeal a declaration of war against the Union by the Southern leaders.

Francis Preston Blair in those days was a "free-soil" Democrat. He opposed the extension of slavery and believed that it could be gradually eradicated. These views were those of Jackson and the great following who looked to him for leadership. He felt that slavery was but a wedge with which the South would split the Union and if they could not rule it they would try to ruin it. The Southern leaders slowly forced the old Jackson free-soil men out of control of the party and into retirement and tried to absorb the country as well, and their success so increased their pride and contempt for the opinion of all opposition that they repealed the Missouri Compromise law and actually threatened to overwhelm the entire country with the evils and abuses of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

At this trumpet call my grandfather withdrew from his retirement at Silver Spring to aid the Republican party, which had already started in a feeble way in 1854 in Wisconsin with the purpose of restricting slav-

<sup>14</sup> Rufus Rockwell Wilson, "Washington the Capital City," Vol. 2, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Kloeberg's "Formation of the Republican Party," p. 37.



SILVER SPRING, FRANCIS BLAIR'S HOUSE, GENERAL BRECKENRIDGE'S  
HEADQUARTERS.





ery. A call for a National Republican Convention or gathering at Pittsburgh, February 22, 1856, was issued from Washington on January 17, 1856, in order to perfect its organization and provide for a National Convention at some subsequent date.<sup>16</sup> My grandfather took an active part in issuing this call from Washington. He attended the conference at Pittsburgh, which was composed of many discordant elements, "whigs, abolitionists, free soldiers, and native Americans, and came near breaking up," and an authority says that through the "efforts of Lewis Clephane, of Washington, D. C., Francis Preston Blair was made permanent chairman or President, without objection, and his ability and tact and discretion prevented a complete fiasco."<sup>17</sup> He certainly presided over the meeting at Pittsburgh which organized the party. An executive committee was selected and it issued a call for a Convention to meet in Philadelphia on June 17. Fremont was nominated for the Presidency.<sup>18</sup> My grandfather was a delegate to this convention and as General Fremont had married Miss Jessie Benton, the daughter of his old friend, Senator Benton from Missouri, in whose office my father started to practice law, it is natural to suspect he had something to do in selecting the first candidate for the Presidency of the Republican party.<sup>19</sup> He was delegate at large for Maryland to the Convention in 1860, when Mr. Lincoln was nominated, and after his election to the Presidency he was a constant adviser and friend of the President, and my father, Montgomery, became his Postmaster-General.<sup>20</sup>

The Silver Spring grounds and gardens were exten-

<sup>16</sup> "Republican Conventions Since 1856," by Henry H. Smith.

<sup>17</sup> "Political Recollections," by George W. Julian, p. 147.

<sup>18</sup> Appleton's Encyclopædia, Vol. 2, p. 688.

<sup>19</sup> "Republican Party," by Francis Curtis.

<sup>20</sup> *U. S. Magazine and Democratic Review*, July, 1845, Vol. 17, p. 14, article entitled "Blair and the Globe."

sive and beautiful. The entrance, always called by the negroes the "Big Gate," was just across the Maryland line from the District line. One of the boundary stones of the District of Columbia as it was laid out under General Washington is within sight of the gate. The old carriage drive wound through heavy forests, until it neared the house, when one drove through a row of horse chestnut trees, beautiful to look at when in bloom, then through a row of large silver pines. The driveway was thought to have been modelled after one of those one sees in the "Bois" in Paris. Crossing a rustic bridge one arrived at the house, in old days of mouse color, and of the type of a French chateau. The circle enabled one to turn conveniently and look at plants or shrubs in a little valley below the drive. The summer kitchens were close to the house, so the negroes could run with the dishes and serve them quite hot to guests in the dining room or large enclosed glass piazza.

A fine row of sugar maple trees lined the walk from the house to the spring, some two city blocks away, on both sides of which were lawns improved with shrubs and trees, many of which were imported.

The rose garden and vegetable garden, the vault in which my great-grandfather and mother had been buried, the grapery, peach orchard and some great fig bushes, which furnished quantities of fruit, were in close proximity and all the land surrounding them were kept under a high state of cultivation and interspersed with walks and paths and hedges. Near the house and across the path leading to the summer kitchen was a large cane break, the plants for which had been brought from Canewood, Kentucky, the home of General Nathaniel Gist, a Revolutionary officer and father of my grandmother. This cane grew so thick and kept so green during the winter that game often

remained there during severe weather for days, finding comfort and shelter. Some of this cane still grows in the same spot.

Not far from the spring was the dairy and "quarters." There the slaves lived and adjoining them were the stables. A roadway ran due west from the spring at the beginning of which was a large summer house called the Acorn, named on account of its shape. This Acorn was built of solid timber, colored like an acorn, with its side supports of gnarled oak, its inside of dressed lumber, and a lamp hanging in the center.

Spring stones were placed around its outside, adding much to its beauty and seats were inside of it. Below this was a large pond in which was an island of spring stones covered with native honeysuckle. The pond had garlands of plants and roses on its banks in successive tiers, each tier of a kind to stand higher than its neighbor which was nearer the pond, so to the eye they rose from the water like seats in a colosseum. The effect was startlingly beautiful, especially when these flowers were in bloom. Below the pond was a bath from a nearby spring, made of concrete and improved by a bath-house, having large overhanging trees and quantities of myrtle, and English ivy clustered and growing profusely all over the space within the enclosure.

Following the path or roadway further towards the west, we passed the mill which in my childhood was no longer used. It had an old wheel turned by water and the inside of the mill faced an interior courtyard and opposite it were large barns for cattle. In my childhood this mill was a mass of English ivy and looked like a ruin.

Following the pathway further one passed across Maria's Bridge, a stucco spring stone ornamental

structure, and struck into the woods. The path thence wound through these along a stream of water which took its origin from the springs mentioned. The first grottoes one met on the walk, which was called by my grandfather the "Grotto Walk," or by some others "Lovers' Walk," was the "Bishop's Chair"; thence by a rustic bridge, the roadway of which was one huge, uneven stone, you came to the principal feature of the walk, a succession of grottoes, a spring and another bath. The largest of these grottoes was sunk deep into a hillside, above which grew lofty trees and underbrush, and it always had an air of mystery about it which suggested secrecy and seclusion. This Grotto walk wound around, turning with the windings of this stream and at various places had seats and bowers. "St. Andrew's Well" and "Violet Spring" are two of the others which I recall. The walk was about a mile in length. One place was named "Hern's Oak," a majestic tree which recalled Falstaff; and the streams, and planting, gave the walk everywhere variety and beauty.

My grandfather loved Silver Spring. It was there he enjoyed his friends and as early as 1854 he gave his Washington house to his son, Montgomery, and settled down among his flowers and slaves and books. His social life was rich. People delighted in visiting him and readily made what was then a long journey in a carriage or on horseback to see him. He knew no enemies, political or otherwise, at his generous table. There north and south were treated alike. His daughter, Mrs. S. P. Lee, and her husband, Admiral S. P. Lee, resided with my grandfather and grandmother, and she and her husband inherited the old home and maintained many of his customs during her life. Her portrait, by Sully, when nineteen, is one of the valued

possessions in the house and it is said of her she would never have another taken, nor even a photograph made, always laughing and saying "Nobody cares to look at the picture of an old woman, nor even at the old woman herself."<sup>21</sup> She lived to be eighty-nine years of age and her love of life and people lasted until the end. Many stories were told by Mrs. Lee, who spent an entire winter in the White House when General Jackson was President, of his ready wit. He must have liked her, since he gave Mrs. Lee, among other gifts, the ring presented to him by Mrs. Eliza W. Custis, February 22, 1825, which Mrs. Custis sent to him by the hand of General Lafayette, saying "the birthday of Washington is the fit time for a tribute of respect to him whose glorious achievements place him next to the father of our country. On this day I present to General Jackson a ring of the hero's hair, of the color it was when he led our soldiers to victory. It was made in this city and of American gold. Wear it in remembrance of him who was first in the hearts of our country and of her who gives it to you with her best wishes for your health and happiness. To General Jackson."<sup>22</sup>

After General Jackson's term, President Van Buren, his successor, was intimate with my grandfather and gave his portrait to him on leaving. He was called the "red fox" by his opponents and always caricatured as one.<sup>23</sup> This portrait shows this expression. It still hangs on the walls of the old house at Silver Spring. Reference has already been made to the strong feeling always displayed by my grandfather when any reference was made to dissolving the Union. He had long felt the South was going to attempt to dis-

<sup>21</sup> Article in *Evening Star*, September 14, 1906.

<sup>22</sup> Article in *Evening Star*, September 14, 1906.

<sup>23</sup> *Evening Star*, September 14, 1906.



member it and create an aristocratic empire founded on slavery. My grandfather was thoroughly democratic. He loved the whole country and believed its future depended upon democracy in its true, not party, meaning. Mr. Clay's Missouri Compromise on the slavery question had held the country together. So, when his young cousin, John C. Breckinridge, came to the United States Senate as Mr. Clay's successor, my grandfather naturally hoped he would take strong ground against any repeal of this law, which would at once cause the country to renew the dangerous agitation of the slavery question. This question was pending when one day Mr. Breckinridge visited Silver Spring and the interview between him and my grandfather is described by Mrs. Lee; she details how he pleaded with Breckinridge to stand up against any repeal of the law and prophesied it was certain to cause civil war and the questions end in blood. Breckinridge returned to Silver Spring a Confederate general with Early on his famous raid.

Mr. Jefferson Davis was also a frequent visitor at Silver Spring, and true to his best nature, my grandfather never allowed politics to interfere with his friendships. He kept them and they kept him, so when President Davis was arrested and threatened with death or imprisonment, Mrs. Davis quite naturally appealed to Francis Preston Blair for succor and help. I have in my possession a hitherto unpublished letter in which she makes the appeal and as she describes the capture of Jefferson Davis by the Federal forces and the disguise he wore, which was exhibited in the War Department for many years, the account of the capture as given by his wife may properly be included in this article:

SAVANNAH, GA., June 6, 1865.

*“Private and confidential.*

*“My dear Mr. Blair:* Fearing ill treatment at the hands of your people in the event of the fall of Richmond, I left it with my family on the 30th of March, and went to Charlotte, where after a residence of ten days, I was again forced to give up the house I had secured and go by rail and wagon route to Ashville, N. C., There I heard of the surrender of General Lee’s grand army and knowing that General Johnston’s was the only barrier left between us and your troops, I deterined to go down to the coast of Florida and thence to embark for Europe for I had but little hope that our dear exhausted army could long resist such overwhelming odds, as your people could bring against it. Mr. Davis had sent his private Secretary to us the day before I came to this decision in order that he might take care of us. Five wagons were furnished us in which we placed our baggage and such supplies of groceries as the exhausted state of the country enabled us to procure. The latter we hoped to trade for milk, butter, or shelter, on the road, because Confederate money was not current in the country and I had no specie. When it was rumored in Abbeville that we were going with only one gentleman over a wagon route infested by bands of demoralized Confederate soldiers, three paroled Confederate gentlemen offered to accompany the train, stating at the same time that they were unarmed, could not fight the Federals if they were not, but could resist by an appearance of strength at least, the poor discouraged, disorganized confederate soldiers, who might with their hopes of success have lost their nice sense of duty. The Hon. Armistead Burt heard the offer of service, and also the announcement of paroled disability. Thus accompanied I went to Washington, Ga., where I heard of Gen. Johnston’s surrender not only of his army but of a whole section to the command of which he had not been assigned on conditions of utter submission on the part of our people. Before the official notification of the surrender had been received, nay before the rumor was credited, a train of seven wagons was organized

and the young men who accompanied me. Lt. Hathaway, Mr. Messie, and Mr. Munroe, finding me still dependent upon their protection begged me to consider them at my service. Capt. Moody of Mississippi, and Maj. Moran, of Louisiana, joined me announcing as did my other friends, that they could not resist the Federals and were unarmed, but would try to protect me from our own people. These with my young brother, eighteen years old, a furloughed midshipman, also unarmed and the seven wagoners who had volunteered to drive us, because they wanted the transportation, out as far West as I was going, and my two colored men servants, constituted the "belligerent train" to catch which a Brigade was sent out. Two of the teamsters had, as I afterwards learned thrown their muskets used while in service into the wagons and one had a broken revolver. After our capture I heard that upon meeting two negroes with some powder and a half bucket of ammunition, and finding that it had been stolen by them, one of the wagoners took away from them, fearful they might make an insurrection and use of it and expressed his intention to trade the ammunition for food on the road. Thus protected, thus equipped, ignorant of Mr. Davis' condition, certain of one thing only, that he would never seek personal immunity by deserting the remnant of our people who were still resistant and willing to die rather than be enslaved, I started out upon the world hoped by constant travelling to reach a port from which I might embark for England, there to await in poverty but freedom, the loss of all I held dear.

When we were camping out the second night after we left Washington, our camp was entered by a company of paroled Confederates under the impression that it was a 'treasure train,' but the Captain fortunately recognized me as having dressed his wounds in Richmond, and after an apology left us. Before they did so I explained to them that a friend had furnished us with \$2,500 in gold in Washington but that this was all. Distracted about my country and my husband, beset upon every side by foes internal and external, I travelled two days further, at the expiration of that time we discovered that we had been followed by a number of General Wheeler's



command, nearly a regiment of Alabama Cavalry, and that they intended to 'storm' our camp that night, taking all our mules and horses and such of our baggage as they needed. It was very bright moonlight, and we loaded all the arms we had, a fine little colts revolver and a fine Adam's self cocking revolver which had been presented to Mr. Davis by the maker and given by him to me to take care of and we retired until the moon should set, knowing they would not attack us in all probability until that time and then I hoped to throw myself upon their generosity, and appeal to them as my legitimate protection, and thus to render the use of fire arms unnecessary. However, before day my husband joined us. He had been travelling nearly the same road accompanied by his staff, the Secretary of the Treasury pro-tem, Judge Reagan, and six armed men as his escort. One of his aids heard at a house that we were to be attacked and robbed, and Mr. Davis rode fifty miles in twelve hours to join us, and to prevent it. He came upon the rendezvous of the cavalry and frightened them away—then joined us for a day and a night, at the expiration of which time we bade him farewell, not expecting to meet him again, but after travelling for a day and night in front of us, he received information that one hundred and fifty men of the same command were at Irvington or Irvingsville and joined us again for purposes of protection, travelling all the day before our capture with us. The night preceeding our capture we camped near a little stream bordered on both sides with a thick growth of underwood and tall trees. The road led across it and we camped on the side nearest to Irvingsville and the wood shut out the view of the road through which we travelled. Mr. Davis had been suffering from billious derangement and could not bear the weight of his Deringer pistol around his waist, therefore handed them to one of his aids: He did not intend to camp with us that night but to ride forward and meet the marauders, if possible, before they reached us. He, therefore, left his pistols in their holsters on the saddle, in the possession of his servant. As night drew on he seemed so exhausted that he decided to stay all night with us. Before I left Richmond in order to pay all the outstanding debts and

to procure money enough to go away from there I sent my silver, china glass, and little ornaments, not excluding the little gifts received from dear friends, years ago, also as much of my clothing and of Mr. Davis's as was not absolutely in use, to be exposed for public sale—some at auction, some at different stores. I also sold the debris of our magnificent library, several hundred volumes, which had been sent us after the Federals robbed us of all that they considered it worth their while to steal or sell. As those things were sold for Confederate money, I left it in Richmond to be converted into gold and sent to me by some convenient opportunity. Judge Reagan brought it to me in a pair of saddle bags upon a pack mule and told me it amounted to a little over \$8,000 in gold. This was left in the ambulance in which we travelled. This money and a pair of fine carriage horses which poverty had compelled me to sell, and which the citizens of Richmond bought, and returned to me, constituted all my worldly wealth. Just before day the enemy charged our camp yelling like demons. Mr. Davis received timely warning of their approach but believing them to be our own people deliberately made his toilette and was only disabused of the delusion, when he saw them deploying a few yards off. He started down to the little stream hoping to meet his servant with his horse and arms, but knowing he would be recognized, I pleaded with him to let me throw over him a large waterproof wrap which had often served him in sickness during the summer season for a dressing gown and which I hoped might so cover his person that in the grey of the morning he would not be recognized. As he strode off I threw over his head a little black shawl which was around my own shoulders, saying that he could not find his hat and after he started sent my colored woman after him with a bucket for water hoping that he would pass unobserved. He attempted no disguise, consented to no subterfuge but if he had in failure is found the only matter of cavil.

“Had he assumed an elaborate female attire as a sacrifice to save a country the heart of which trusted in him, it had been well. When he had proceeded a few yards the guards around our tents with a shocking oath called out to know who that



MRS. JEFFERSON DAVIS.



was. I said it was my mother and he halted Mr. Davis who threw off the cloak with a defiance and when called upon to surrender did not do so and but for the interposition of my person between his and the guns would have been shot. I told the man to shoot me if he pleased, to which he answered he 'would not mind it a bit,' which I readily believe. While this was transpiring a scene of robbery was going on in camp, which beggars description—trunks were broken open, letters and clothing scattered on the ground—all the gold taken, even our prayer books and bibles taken from the ambulances. These latter articles were easily recovered as being of no use to the robbers. My baby's little wardrobe was stolen almost entirely, the other children shared the same fate. When we reached Savannah, the city contributed a part of their children's clothes to clothe them until I could have more made. The negroes were robbed of their wardrobe and the Federal soldiers wore their clothing before them, though reminded of the fact by the negroes. Our faithful slave Robert owned his horse which was taken from him and turned over to one of the officers as were my horses. Capt. Husdon so said his men received my gold, took the lion's share and secreted the rest for the soldiers, consequently Col. Pritchard's search for it among the valuables of the men was unsuccessful. Col. Pritchard did what he could to protect us from insult, but against robbery he was powerless to give us protection, though I feel sure he tried to prevent it. We were robbed not once, nor twice, but every time the wagons stopped. When we had progressed about ten miles on our dreary return from the scene of our capture, a man met us having a paper containing the first copy the cavalry had seen of Mr. Johnson's infamous accusation against Mr. Davis, and the reward offered for his apprehension. It gave him no uneasiness, and was evidently not believed by the men to be founded in truth. In conversation with some of the officers, Mr. Davis' staff were told that it was fortunate that no resistance was made for they were ordered if any was offered to fire into the tents (there being only two, and those two containing women and children) and make a general massacre. Another said, 'bloody work'

would have been made of the whole party. Col. Pritchard told me he did not expect to find Mr. Davis with me but came out to take my train and carry it back to Macon as a 'belligerent train.' In the jam of the attested fact, that not a gun was fired by our party, that no arms were found except those of Mr. Davis' escort, the gentlemen who accompanied me were thrown into prison to be tried for the violation of their parole. Will you not interest yourself for them? When were men punished by a great nation for the offer of service to a helpless woman and her little defenceless children? There were no public papers—no one professes to have found anything of value, only a desolate woman's belongings and some commissary's stores for her little ones, and servants. Yet these unhappy young men are consigned to a prison though just released from a confinement of two years' duration only a month before. I thought Satan was the only being wicked enough to desire to punish men for the indulgence of the manly virtues which he is incapable of feeling. At your advanced age you would do the same that they did for an unprotected woman. Will you take care of them and see that they have a fair trial?"

After being brought to Old Point, where President Jefferson Davis was confined and away from her, Mrs. Davis states the unappreciative rogues of the country had left her a diminutive Japanese cabinet, and the more refined rogues of Old Point stole it with a little china cup and saucer—the gift of a dear friend, and numberless other petty larcenies.

"Sick and without help, save at the hands of our guard, the 14th Maine, who had fought too long and too bravely to oppress women and children, kindly even sympathetically treated by the crew of the ship, I was forced to return to Savannah—here to exhaust the little money left me, with my little ones, unacclimated children and teething baby, wasting away from the hot climate. Sympathy and homes were proffered me on all sides but where all were robbed and beggared as well as I, the



former only could be accepted, and now to you, I appeal to tell me for what I am detained here. Why I alone am excluded from my husband's trial? What have I done that I am a prisoner at large with my family in a strange place surrounded by detectives who report every visitor? Have I transgressed any rule of your government since I have been under its dread tyranny? Why am I kept in a garrisoned town bereft of home, friends, husband and the means of support? Insulted by a licentious press, which spreads upon its daily journals every agony of my tortured husband—May God forgive them they know not what they do.

“I have written this to you because I know you would like to hear the truth, and trust me that I will tell it, knowing as well as you that the things I have said as the outpourings of my heart to you would injure his cause if known to others. Please consider the letter entirely private. If I have been diffuse, it is because it is so hard to compress such conduct to the helpless in so small a compass. Let me tell you a significant fact. Save Col. Pritchard and Genl. Upton, no federal officer offered me the courteous salutation usual from a gentleman to a lady until Lt. Grant of the 14th Maine took charge of us. We were treated with less consideration than I have seen my knightly husband show to the beggars who came to our door for alms. I never knew him to stand covered in the presence of a woman or allow one to be persecuted. With thoughts of ‘martial’ faith and country, he stands before me, and I can say no more. With sincerest affection,

“Your distressed friend,

“NAVINA DAVIS.”

Just before this General Early made his raid through Maryland—“too late Early,” as he was called. No history of Silver Spring would be complete without mention of the famous barrel, not the money barrel politicians love, but the barrel of Bourbon whiskey which lay in the cellar, and when powder and shot could not save the Capitol at Washington, it did. The officers of the Confederates made their headquarters

at the old house, which is scarcely seven miles from this city, and proceeded to drink up as much of it as they could. They also found the dresses and clothes of my half-sister, Mrs. Comstock, dressed up as women and amused themselves dancing and drinking and instead of pushing through Fort Stevens that afternoon when few, if any, soldiers were on guard, remained at Silver Spring until morning. The Sixth Massachusetts arrived the following day and Washington was saved. General Early burned my father's house, known as "Falkland," which adjoined that of Silver Spring. It was a total loss, because although insured it was not insured against the public enemy.

General Early afterwards denied having authorized this vandalism, when it was criticized by good people everywhere. My father was a member of Mr. Lincoln's cabinet and the only Southern man in it. His heart was full of tender feeling for the Southern people, and Virginia and Kentucky were full of his kin and boyhood friends. Like my grandfather, during the war, he never failed in trying to lessen its sufferings and the numbers of Southern people whom he helped out of prison and aided were legion. When his house was burned he was in Mr. Lincoln's cabinet and great resentment arose on both sides.

Referring to the house General Early's interview is as follows:

"Recently in Maryland, the house of Gov. Bradford was burned without my orders. But I must add that I approved it and had I been present would have ordered it in retaliation for the burning of the house of Governor Letcher whom I know to be a very poor man and whose family was not allowed five minutes to remove clothing or other valuables. Afterwards when in front of Washington some of my troops were very determined to destroy the house of Mr. Francis P. Blair



and had actually removed some of the furniture probably supposing it to belong to his son, a member of the Federal Cabinet. As soon as I came up I immediately stopped the proceeding and compelled the men to return every article so far as I knew and placed a guard to protect it. The house of his son, Montgomery Blair a member of the Cabinet, was subjected to a different rule for obvious reasons."

As I have already said, the burning of Falkland excited strong feelings of resentment. General Benjamin F. Butler immediately sent word that he intended retaliating upon the South for the outrage, but my father wished no retaliation.

He wrote the following letter to General Butler:

“WASHINGTON, D. C.,

“August 10, 1864.

“*My dear General Butler:* I received, several days ago, your telegram announcing the destruction of Seddon's in retaliation for the burning of mine. I have delayed acknowledging it because whilst thankful for the consideration which induced you to resent my wrongs—I have yet regretted your action on this occasion.

“It is not because I have any regard for Seddon or Letcher, that I regret the destruction of their property by the order of our military commanders. They deserve a much worse punishment, I know, and I trust they may yet receive it, but it will not be punishment unless they get it at the hands of the law. I have a great horror of lawlessness and it does not remove my repugnance to it that it is practiced upon the lawless. If we allow the military to invade the rights of private property on any other grounds than those recognized by civilized warfare, there will soon cease to be any security whatever for the rights of civilians on either side.

“The tendency of such measures is to involve our country in all the horrors of the Wars of the Fronde, of the petty Princes and Brigands of Italy, of the Guerillas of Spain, which made the plunder of the peaceful citizens' homes, highway robbery and assassination, the concomitants of the war.



"No man, I know, would appreciate such results more than myself, and there are no talents on which I would sooner rely than yours to prevent it, if you had proper support.

"Yours truly,  
"M. Blair."

"It may be proper to say that it was intimated to me through my postal agent that it was contemplated to burn Seddon's home shortly after mine was burned in retaliation for that act and I directed him to say that I hoped it would not be done."

After the death of Francis P. Blair and his wife, Mrs. S. P. Lee inherited Silver Spring for her lifetime, with the proviso it should go to her son, Blair Lee, the present owner and recently a senator from Maryland. Admiral S. P. Lee, her husband, resided there for many years. He served in the Navy through the Civil War with great distinction, and was the last survivor of the great war admirals. He had been commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron and of the Mississippi Squadron during the Civil War. Welles in his diary gives him credit for great honesty in those days when this trait of character was often overlooked by those in command of blockades, who permitted blockade runners for a consideration to get through the blockade. Mr. Welles also tells us in his diary that he received for his thoroughness in catching these Confederate vessels the largest sum of prize money distributed. He was sailor-like in his farming. He saw the farm as he would a man-o'-war. His workmen reported like jackies at a roll call and it is said that all the daily doings—the fields plowed and planted—the state of each crop—the hours of every laborer—each and all, were set down in a log-book called "the Silver Spring Log." He not only argued that farming should be reduced to a ship-shape system, but he did it. The Admiral remained living at Silver

Spring, known far and wide for his pleasant greetings to every neighbor and running his log until 1897, when he died at the age of eighty-five.

My grandmother, Violet Gist, for whom I was named—a tall, strong-looking old lady—rode horseback every morning until a few days before her death, when she was eighty-two, and her spirit should linger along that winding roadway which follows Sligo Branch, now where the Seventh Day Adventists have a great sanitarium. This was opened for her to ride horseback through these woods, long before the Civil War, and extended about seven miles almost entirely on the Silver Spring property.

Francis Preston Blair had three sons besides the daughter who lived with him. The youngest, Francis P. Blair, Jr., was a member of Congress and in the United States Senate from Missouri, a general in the Union Army during the Civil War, commanding the Seventeenth Corps of Sherman's Army and active in retaining Missouri in the Union, in company with General Lyon, and in whose honor the state has placed his statue by the side of Senator Benton in Statuary Hall in the Capitol at Washington. James L. Blair, the next brother, a lieutenant in the U. S. Navy, died at the early age of thirty-five. His widow lived at Silver Spring in her place, called the "Moorings," until her death a few years ago. My father, the eldest, was the most identified with Silver Spring, living there from 1853, when he returned from St. Louis, until his death in 1883. General Jackson appointed him to West Point, where he graduated and later resigned to study law. Like my grandfather, he imbibed the Jacksonian Democracy, believing in the everlasting Union of the states and the ultimate destruction of slave property. (My grandfather owned numbers

of slaves, among whom "Uncle Henry," the coachman, and "Aunt Nanny," the cook, still figure in my memory, but my father would never own a slave. He represented a more militant attitude towards abolition. The dramatic events of the decades between 1853-1883 saw him always on the firing line.<sup>1</sup> My grandfather loved his ease and his Silver Spring, and I remember him a very old gentleman in his silk dressing gown going into his rose garden and pulling off the heads of the roses by slipping them between his fingers and bringing them back in his dressing gown's pocket to lay them without stems in a beautiful silver dish, which was fashioned like a huge leaf, along the tendrils of which ran a little water. And this dish, when filled with these rose heads, looked like some lovely big new flower. My father felt duty always calling to him. He helped secure a defense for John Brown at Harper's Ferry.<sup>24</sup> He defended Dred Scott before the Supreme Court of the United States. He sat as a delegate in the convention that nominated Fremont in 1856. He represented Silver Spring and Montgomery County in the convention that nominated Lincoln in 1860, as the delegate from the Sixth District of Maryland. He was Postmaster-General under Mr. Lincoln, and when the President and cabinet hesitated about sending supplies to Fort Sumter, although the youngest member of the cabinet, he declared it treason and handed in his resignation, but President Lincoln declined to accept it and agreed with his view. He gave the country as Postmaster-General, free delivery, the postal car service, and made it what it is today.<sup>25</sup>

He abrogated the franking privilege then enjoyed

<sup>24</sup> See Testimony of Chilton, Brown's attorney, Pub. Doc. Report on J. B. Raid.

<sup>25</sup> See a Pamphlet called "Public Career of Montgomery Blair," by Madison Davis.



FRANCIS PRESTON BLAIR AND HIS WIFE, VIOLET GIST, AS THEY LOOKED AT THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR IN THE UNITED STATES. FROM A COLORED PHOTOGRAPH OWNED BY MAJOR GIST BLAIR, SAID TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN AT SILVER SPRING.





by every small postmaster and brought down upon his head a storm of indignation. He curtailed and restricted the charges for railway mail transportation and brought against himself their power. (See his Post Office Annual Report in 1861, p. 30; 1862, p. 32; 1863, Sec. 42.)

He introduced the scheme for registering letters and exacted rigid accountability on the part of postal employees. He established the Railway Post Office system, by which the railway car became a perambulating post office and letters were distributed in the car direct to their destination.<sup>26</sup> No one can now estimate the time saved in their delivery by this simple novelty. He drove out the private letter express business and what was familiarly called "the penny post system," and introduced in its place the letter carrier and collection of letters. This is called the "Free Delivery" system. By it the citizen received his letters at his residence or place of business and mailed his letters in locked boxes near his home or office, similar to what we have today. We have lived to see this extended into the great farming districts under the name of "Rural Free Delivery."

He recommended and outlined the money order system in his annual report in 1862, adopted the month after he resigned.

But his most far-reaching reform and accomplishment was the Universal Postal Union, suggested to him by Honorable John A. Kasson. See pages 11 and 12, Report of Postmaster-General, 1863. This was the organization of the countries of the world for an international exchange of mail. He drew the rules submitted to the Congress which met at Paris May 11,

<sup>26</sup> Reprinted from the RECORDS OF THE COLUMBIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Washington, D. C., Vol. 13, in 1910.

1863, which agreed to the thirty-one articles, about the same today.<sup>27</sup>

Great losses of revenue occurred by reason of the South seceding, and yet the great deficit arising in the Post Office of the year before was reduced 50 per cent. in the first year he held office, and in the year ending June 30, 1865, the surplus was \$861,431 in the Post Office Department.<sup>28</sup>

How the President felt when he resigned can best be understood from the letter he wrote him:

“EXECUTIVE MANSION,  
“WASHINGTON, D. C.,  
“Sept. 23, 1864.

“HONORABLE MONTGOMERY BLAIR,

“*My dear Sir:* You have generously said to me more than once that whenever your resignation could be a relief to me it was at my disposal. The time has come. You very well know that this proceeds from no dissatisfaction of mine with you personally or officially. Your uniform kindness has been unsurpassed by that of any friend, and it is true that the War does not so greatly add to the difficulties of your Department as to those of some other. It is yet much to say, as I most truly can, that in the three years and a half during which you have administered the general Post Office, I remember no single complaint against you in connection therewith.

“Yours, as ever,  
“A. LINCOLN.”

After Mr. Lincoln's assassination he withdrew from the Republican party on the reconstruction questions and appeared before the Supreme Court in the Test Oath cases by which the laws to disfranchise the white people of the border states were successfully contested before the courts and presided over the first convention in Maryland to demand the rights of her white

<sup>27</sup> See Testimony of Chilton, Brown's attorney, Pub. Doc. Report on J. B. Raid.

<sup>28</sup> Report of Postmaster General, 1888, pp. 753-755.





MONTGOMERY BLAIR, WHILE POSTMASTER-GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES.



citizens and denounce these laws. He was a friend and champion of Tilden; was of counsel for him before the Electoral Commission and boldly denounced the fraud by which Hayes was seated. He edited a newspaper called the *Union* in the city of Washington as Mr. Tilden's representative, and for which the money was furnished by Mr. W. W. Corcoran. Its columns boldly denounce the principal politicians of the day, both North and South, and long before the decision of the Electoral Commission was rendered, it declared in rather strong language just what it would be. It is not to be wondered that this newspaper is now not only difficult to find, but few even know of its existence. In the few hours given my father for the development of Silver Spring, he gave most of them to "Grace Church," which he helped establish in 1858. He was a lay reader in the Protestant Episcopal Church and vestryman in St. John's Church, Washington, D. C., as well as Grace Church, Montgomery County, for many years, and often during the winter when the clergyman could not officiate, drove through the cold, the snow, or rain from Washington to this little church in the country, miles away, to read the services of the Episcopal Church to the few who gathered there.

No more striking instance of his independence and fearless disregard of consequence to himself can be instanced than his denunciation of Captain Wilkes for seizing Mason and Slidell, Confederate Commissioners, on a British ship. When Wilkes was being fêted everywhere and had been thanked by a resolution of Congress, when the country was effervescing over Captain Wilkes, he saw the trouble ahead with Great Britain, and stood alone in the Lincoln cabinet against it, receiving the unmeasured abuse of the country, and the reproaches of his colleagues. He was right, and

recently a pamphlet by Charles Francis Adams, called the "*Trent Affair*," was published for private circulation in which he gives my father unstinted praise for his action and graphically portrays the sentiment of the country at the time and how close it brought us to a war with England.

But these questions are historical and to be found in any history.

#### MODERN SILVER SPRING.

When I returned from St. Louis to settle in Maryland in 1897, Silver Spring was a cross-roads without inhabitants. A toll-gate existed about half a mile north of the station on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, charging tolls to those who lived south of it for obtaining their mail. Rural free delivery did not then exist, so I circulated a petition for a post office for the district south of the toll-gate and the office of Silver Spring was named and established near the station on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, and I was made postmaster May 5, 1899. The office was kept in existence only by constant fighting, because it interfered seriously with Sligo, a quarter of a mile away, and just north of the toll-gate, the receipts for that office then depending on the number of letters mailed and cancelled there. In 1900 the postmaster at Sligo succeeded in having the Silver Spring office discontinued, but I secured a further hearing, and had the order discontinuing it "rescinded." I remained postmaster until February 21, 1906, and established the Money Order System and the Rural Free Delivery there with three carriers. The office requiring more time than I could give it, I resigned, and Mr. Frank L. Hewitt, my assistant, succeeded me and remained postmaster until removed by a Democratic administration.

Silver Spring now has the Woman's Coöperative



MRS. MONTGOMERY BLAIR, 1867.





Improvement Society, organized about four years ago. It is a most efficient, useful and public-spirited organization. Mrs. W. B. Newman, who was president until recently, has been succeeded by Mrs. L. E. Warren.

The Volunteer Fire Association was organized two years ago, and possesses a complete modern fire apparatus. The president is William Juvenal, and Clay V. Davis secretary.

The militia company, consisting of seventy-five men, drill in the Silver Spring Armory and served during the recent troubles on the border with Mexico. They are a "crack" company and considered one of the best in Maryland.

Brooke Lee, son of Honorable Blair Lee, is captain, and Frank L. Hewitt lieutenant.

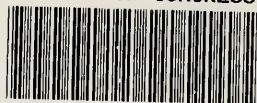
Silver Spring at present consists of some seventy-five dwellings, ten stores, a mill, and a national bank. Its growth and prosperity are assured.

It has not been incorporated as a town, therefore, suffers from many of the troubles of unincorporated villages. Sewers, gas, water, and policemen have their advantages, but the neighborhood has been so free from the evildoer that the police are not needed. Electric light enables us to see without gas and a country town with many gardens and surrounding fields, when a healthy community, overlooks the sewer problem, and the rain from heaven collects water by the down spout when your well runs dry at less cost than the water main. But these bountiful aids to nature are not likely to live many months longer in Silver Spring, for this flourishing community is even now planning a government to furnish all of these necessities, besides the many other modern conveniences which we receive from politics and politicians, and for which we pay in good old American money.





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